

## German Foreign Policy and Eastern Partnership: Position Paper of the Eastern Partnership Task Force

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## German Foreign Policy and Eastern Partnership

### Position Paper of the Eastern Partnership Task Force

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#### Problem Definition

The Eastern Partnership is more than an instrument of EU foreign policy. Stabilization and democratization are essential components of both European and German foreign policy. However, German policy in respect of the countries of the Eastern Partnership<sup>1</sup> is too passive; it is completely absorbed with the financial and monetary crisis. Independent of this, there is a lack of strategic thinking, alertness, coherence and consistency. On historical, cultural, as well as economic grounds, the eastern European neighborhood provides a point of focus for German foreign policy. However, Germany has failed to make sufficient use of this opportunity. It has failed to adequately define its new identity as a country in the center of Europe, either following the upheavals of 1989/91 and German reunification, or after the EU's eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007: The existing bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation have not been precisely defined in order to develop a sustainable, long-term European strategy which embraces German interests. Instead, they largely remain short-term and ineffective. Domestic political interests are the current mainsprings of foreign policy, while international considerations,

in the absence of a clear definition of foreign policy goals and interests, receive insufficient attention. Furthermore, self-critical reflection is required in respect of the observance of democratic and constitutional principles within the EU.

In order for Germany, as a member of the EU and NATO, to develop a coherent foreign policy in respect of the countries of the eastern neighborhood the different perspectives, thought structures and positions must be recognized. The frequently cited dichotomy between a democracy guided by values and the promotion of economic development governed by interests, neither stands the test of a practical political analysis, nor is it conducive to the development of an operational policy. Values and interests are two sides of the same coin: The promotion of the rule of law and transparency, the dismantling of corruption, as well as the development of open markets and economic integration, result from an interest in political and economic stability and form the basis for the development of democracy, pluralism and human rights standards. If a society succeeds in developing a consensus of values on this basis, then it will enjoy long-term stability. This is the experience of the western democracies. Stability based on repression will not prevail in the long-term.

<sup>1</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The foreign policy discourse in Germany avoids addressing geostrategic issues. However, the reality of the situation must be recognized: When Russia speaks of stability it is thinking in terms of the balance of forces and spheres of influence. Consequently, it is just as legitimate to view the Eastern Partnership within the context of geostrategic considerations. With this concept the European Union aims to disseminate its political, legal and economic “rules of the game”, and thus effect a step by step integration of the region. In the process, the EU, through certain offers of cooperation, attempts to prevent the economic plight of the eastern partners leading them to accept other integration models in conflict with European interests.

## Orientation Recommendations

1. Individual EU member states ascribe the Eastern Partnership different levels of importance. As a result, the EU operates on the basis of the lowest common denominator. In order to accord the Eastern Partnership priority Germany should place greater emphasis on cooperation with Poland as a component of the EU’s eastern foreign policy. Poland and Germany assume a special role in this matter. The linking of Polish and German interests generates synergies. Both states command considerable economic as well as political weight. Together, plausible strategies can be developed and the majorities required for fashioning EU foreign policy can be won. Germany is guided by economic interests in Russia, however it does not define any concrete issues in respect of the countries of the Eastern Partnership. In contrast, Poland largely formulates its interests in respect of its eastern neighbors in terms of security policy. However, despite obvious progress, Poland has failed to establish a definition of its interests in respect of Russia which extends beyond efforts at a harmonization of the strained relations. Russia is not a member of the European Partnership, nevertheless it is a partner with whom the EU must constructively engage on issues of neighborhood policy.
2. Conditionality, which declares certain democratic and constitutional reforms as conditions for cooperation, should be subjected to critical scrutiny as it has little substance in terms of practical politics. Such reforms are the goal and not the precondition for cooperation with states whose transformation is still in a state of flux. When political conditionality is vehemently demanded on the one side – as exemplified by the EU Commission’s new approach of “more for more” – but is not consistently and vigorously implemented on the other, then this leads to a loss of credibility and the accusation of double standards on the part of those affected. Democracy cannot be exported, it can only be promoted through cooperation: A democratic system that develops according to the given historical, cultural, social and economic circumstances, should, amongst other things, be participative, accountable and transparent, as well as responding to the needs of its citizens. Germany and the European Union should not set themselves up as “moral judges”. Instead, they should accept the autonomous nature of the demand for political concepts, flexibly devise cooperation through the negotiation of fundamental standards, and not block future cooperation. Cooperation contributes more to the system transformation of autocracies than their isolation.
3. Germany and the EU must pay more attention to the heterogeneous stakeholder structures within the partner countries. Their “black boxes” must be opened and a balanced, continuous and sustainable cooperation pursued with different local, regional,

economic, political, scientific, and civil society stakeholders with diverging interests. Experience teaches us that an exclusive focus on the ruling elite at the expense of civil society is an impediment to democratic development. Furthermore, in the event of changing power relations, this can result in a significant loss of influence and long-term difficulties in accessing political communities.

4. The completion of the free trade zone with the states of the Eastern Partnership and Russia serves the interests of both sides. Germany's economy would profit considerably from the dismantling of trade restrictions. The EU demands from members of the Eastern Partnership that they adopt its body of law, the *acquis communautaire*. This attitude must be critically scrutinized as it not only creates an asymmetrical negotiating position but can ultimately appear protectionist if the specific conditions and needs of the partners are not understood. The EU, and Germany in particular, must not view its Eastern Partnership countries as simply markets with potential consumers and favorable production zones with qualified workforces. Instead, they must be provided with the opportunity to export products to the EU. Imports do not represent a form of destructive competition for the European and German economies. Quite the opposite. Export opportunities for the Eastern Partnership states would promote modernization and the development of a small and medium sized business sector, which in the long-term would support the development of democracy and human rights. The precondition for concluding a free trade agreement with the EU is the development of constitutional governance. This constitutes a decision in favor of a particular system. The associated qualitative improvement in the investment climate for European Union companies will in turn stimulate economic and socio-political
- developments in the partner countries. For example, in the long term, the introduction of a free trade zone with the Republic of Moldova would constitute a more sustainable incentive for resolving the Transnistrian conflict than political initiatives such as the Meseberg Process - ultimately the Transnistrian elite would surely seek to profit from the economic advantages of the free trade zone.
5. It is in the political as well as economic interests of both Germany and Europe to promote visa liberalization. The German industry's Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations has already taken up a clear position on this issue and formulated concrete recommendations. Furthermore, cross-border exchange programs promote the development of civil societies and thus the transformation processes. Nevertheless, the Federal Government has been acting restrictively in this respect, thus obstructing the entire process. For the implementation of visa-free regions an overall strategy is required. Due to the historical entanglement of the Eastern Partnership states with Russia and the resulting multiple citizenship of numerous citizens, the practical implementation of visa liberalization, for example for Ukraine while excluding Russia (or vice versa), will prove difficult and politically problematic. The blockade of European decisions by individual EU member states who fail to resist domestic political pressure needs to be more clearly distinguished from technical constraints on the road to implementation, and dealt with accordingly.
6. Germany's contribution to the development of EU foreign policy must be differentiated according to regional and country-specific factors. Each country of the Eastern Partnership must be considered separately. Thinking in categories is inappropriate. Every form of rapprochement with the EU requires

an individually coordinated strategy. Bilateral relationships and an individual willingness to integrate must not be made dependent on developments in other countries. The southern and eastern dimensions of European neighborhood policy must be differentiated according to regional needs and demands and not treated in a uniform manner.

7. The EU's enlargement policy has lost its vigor. On the one side integration is justified by the inability of each individual European state to solve present and future problems alone; on the other, the Eastern Partnership countries are denied a credible perspective for accession. The experience of eastern enlargement has shown that a realistic accession perspective eases and accelerates the reform process, whilst the absence of such a credible perspective – as in the case of Turkey – has a negative effect on the willingness to reform. The EU's ambiguous position on enlargement policy leads to frustration amongst the Eastern Partnership countries as the respective offers from the EU fail to live up to expectations. Since the last eastern enlargement, the EU gives the impression of being afraid of its own courage. An accession perspective is not an enforceable promise but a commonly defined strategic goal. On the road to accession intermediate steps in the form of stepwise and differentiated integration are conceivable. Successive integration can already

be seen in the ongoing negotiations on a free visa regime, for acceptance into the Schengen region, the euro zone, and the energy community, for membership of certain collaborative programs and EU agencies, as well as participation in instruments for greater cooperation in common foreign and security policy matters. Negotiations on the free trade agreement already imply the acceptance of up to 80% of the *acquis communautaire*. The successive participation in the domestic market and further communities means the de facto adoption of a large part of the EU's body of law. The desire for political codetermination within the EU presupposes fulfillment of the Copenhagen Criteria in their entirety and the granting of full EU membership.

#### In summary we put on record:

The Eastern Partnership is of central importance for the development of a foreign policy strategy for the European Union. It is in Germany's interest to decisively influence this process. To this end, the Federal Government should appoint a Special Representative for the Eastern Partnership who will coordinate strategic considerations at the national level, establish their political visibility and bring them to bear on the formulation of European foreign policy in a concerted manner.